ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method for providing grades of service to unprotected traffic on an optical network that provides protection channels associated with working channels, defines a linearly ordered set of protection switch request priorities, and two or more grade of service priorities, and uses those priorities to enforce a protection access policy. The unprotected traffic may be of a high priority, approximating non-pre-emptable unprotected traffic (NUT); of low priority, like extra traffic; or may be of an intermediate priority between the two. This allows data transport providers to offer different unprotected transport services at different rates on protected links, in which the different unprotected transport services are associated with different probabilities of pre-emption.